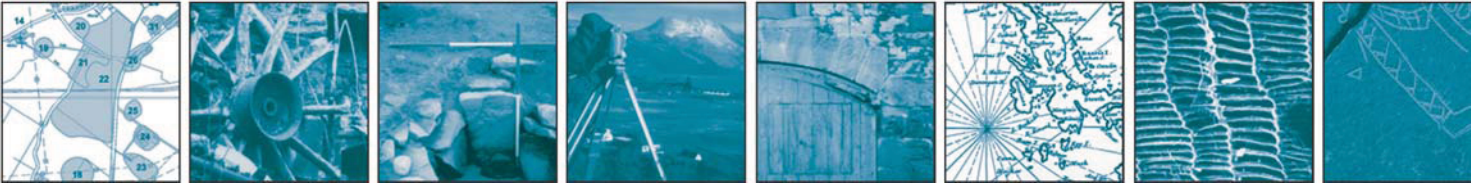


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Lamb's House, Leith, Edinburgh Phase 1 Archaeological Site Investigation

Paul Masser

INTRODUCTION

Planning background

EDI Group are proposing to carry out Site Investigation works beside Lamb's House, Leith, prior to submitting a planning application for redevelopment in the vicinity. The site investigation comprises excavation of geotechnical trial pits within the paved area to the SW of Lamb's House, and within the area currently occupied by a single-storey extension to the NW, which would be demolished and replaced by a new building under the proposals. Because City of Edinburgh Council Archaeology Service requires archaeological mitigation of any disturbance caused by the Site Investigation works, the trial pit locations are to be archaeologically excavated in advance. The phase 1 investigation, covered in this report, comprises excavation of two test pits in the paved area to the SW of Lamb's House. Phase 2 will comprise excavation of additional test pits within the area of the building to the NW, once it has been demolished.

Site description

Lamb's House, a National Trust for Scotland property, considered to be one of the most important historic buildings in Leith, is situated at the corner of Burgess Street and Water Street. The front of the house faces SW onto a sunken courtyard, which is currently paved with concrete slabs and surrounded by grass-grown steps rising to the level of the street, approximately 1 m higher than the courtyard, to the SW and SE. A modern single-storey extension to the NW of the house projects out to the SW as far as Burgess Street, and also faces onto the courtyard to the SE.

Historical and archaeological background

A settlement and harbour at Leith is documented from 1128, when David I granted it to Holyrood Abbey, and it grew to become Scotland's principal port from the late medieval period onwards. The existing street plan in this area partially preserves the original layout of medieval Leith, with a row of burgh plots running back from the Shore towards Water Street. Excavations nearby at 40-43 Water Street (NGR NT 2710 7636, Stronach 2002) and Burgess Street (NGR NT 2705 7640, Collard and Reed 1994) have located middens and turf banks of 12th century date, succeeded by long and complex sequences of medieval and post-medieval occupation. The excavations at 40-43 Water Street showed that Water Street, originally known as Rotten Row, was inserted in the 14th century as the backlands of the plots fronting onto the Shore became increasingly developed.

Lamb's House (NMRS Site no. NT27NE 4) is a fine example of a combined dwelling house and warehouse, typical of harbour towns around the North Sea during the 17th century. The first recorded resident in the 16th century was Andrew Lamb, who may have been the same person who entertained Mary Queen of Scots on her arrival from France in 1561. The existing building, however, is considered to be early 17th century in style.

In the 19th century, Lamb's House faced onto Water's Close, which originally extended all the way through from the Shore to Water Street (or Water Lane). Two rows of buildings, with a narrow pend between, are shown on the 1849-53 Ordnance Survey town plan between Water's Close and Burgess Close (fig. 3). By the time of the 1876-7 revision, the south-western row of buildings had been demolished, and Burgess Close widened and renamed Burgess Street. Also by this date, the building facing Lamb's House at the end of Water's Close had been demolished, and was shown as a walled yard. Further redevelopment has taken place over the course of the 20th century, and only the building facing onto the Shore (57-58 Shore, 10 Burgess Street) remains today of the buildings that formerly stood between Water's Close and Burgess Close.

METHODOLOGY

Two test pits, numbered 1 and 2, were excavated by hand after lifting the concrete slabs within the courtyard. All deposits beneath the slabs that were lifted were excavated to natural subsoil, with the exception of a wall within Test Pit 1 which was left in situ. The dimensions of Test Pits 1 and 2 were 1.8 x 1.2 m and 1.2 x 1.2 m respectively. Following excavation and recording, the test pits were backfilled (for reasons of public safety) and the slabs replaced.

All deposits, cuts and structural remains were assigned individual context numbers and described on pro forma context record sheets. An overall plan showing the location of the test pits in relation to Lamb's House was drawn at 1:100 scale, the features within the test pits were planned at 1:20 and sections drawn at 1:10. A full photographic record was taken, using colour slide, colour print and digital formats. All finds were retained, except in the case of common building materials of which only a sample was kept. The finds have been assessed by Julie Franklin. Bulk environmental samples were taken from contexts with potential for environmental analysis, and have been assessed by Scott Timpany.

RESULTS

Test Pit 1

The earliest feature encountered was a stone wall (Context 10) crossing the SE end of the test pit, built within a foundation trench (Context 22). Finds from the backfill of the foundation trench (Context 21) suggest a late 18th or early 19th century date for the construction of the wall. A large pit (Context 9) occupied the south corner of the test pit, partially cutting into the backfill of the wall foundation. Both features were cut into sand subsoil which contained well-sorted horizons of stones and shells, clearly identifying it as a raised beach deposit. The pit (Context 9) contained mixed soil and rubble deposits (Contexts 6, 13 and 19) which also extended over the rest of the test pit, and contained finds that are clearly late 19th or early 20th century in date. Some looser deposits in the south corner (Contexts 7 and 8) may represent more recent disturbance, possibly by a service trench, as a plastic bag was found in the base.

Test Pit 2

Overlying the sand subsoil at a depth of 0.25 - 0.3 m (4.7 - 4.75 m O.D.) was a thin and patchy layer of silty sand (Context 12) that appears to be a remnant of a buried soil horizon. Similar material filled two slight linear features (Contexts 14 and 16) that crossed the corner of the test pit on a NNE-SSW alignment. These features are tentatively interpreted as trenches for fences or beams, but may be very truncated. Small sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from both Contexts 14 and 16. Overlying Context 12 was a layer of compacted rubble (Context 9), which contained late 19th century material. A thin layer of compacted silt with frequent charcoal/cinder (Context 3) overlay Context 9, and may represent the formation of a soil horizon over the compacted rubble surface.

THE FINDS

Julie Franklin

The assemblage is mostly of modern date, but for two small sherds of medieval pottery. The medieval sherds are from the fills of two gullies (015 & 017) at the base of TP2. They are of locally made White Gritty Ware and are of probable 13th or 14th century date.

The next earliest material is of 19th century date, from a wall cut and pit at the base of TP1 (019 & 021). This is largely structural debris: handmade bricks, and ironmongery, with a few sherds of bottle glass and pottery.

Other finds, from the upper layers of both Test Pits seem to have been deposited in the 20th century. In TP2 (003, 011) these are mostly structural debris: bricks, stone, concrete, floor tiles and drain pipe, with only two sherds of pottery. By contrast, in TP1 (007, 006 & 013), they are mostly of domestic waste: mainly bottle glass, including a complete milk bottle and foil top, with a few nails, pieces of window glass and a metal cable.

ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES

Introduction

Two 10-litre samples (001, 002) were taken from two gullies [015 and 017] at the base of Test Pit 2. The samples were processed to obtain any information that may be able to date the deposits. The gullies are suggested to date to the medieval or post medieval period.

Methods

The two samples were processed in laboratory conditions using a standard floatation method (cf. Kenward *et al*, 1980).

Results

With the exception of occasional to common quantities of charcoal fragments, no other charred plant remains were recovered from the samples. The charcoal fragments present were all less than 1cm in size and are therefore not suitable for further identification and/or Accelerated Mass Spectrometry (AMS) dating. Other finds present within the samples include fragments of marine shell including: oyster, mussel, cockle and whelk. Unburnt bone fragments of fish and mammal were also present in rare quantities within each sample. A single sherd of pottery was recovered from each sample, which may be able to date the deposits (see Finds report). Fragments of coal and cinders were also present within the samples.

Discussion

The collective assemblage from the two deposits is indicative of a midden-type deposit with remains of possible food debris in the form of marine shell of edible species such as oyster, mussels and cockles, together with unburnt fish and mammal bone. Other potential domestic material found within the deposits include: pottery sherds and fragments of charcoal, coal and cinders. Similar midden-type deposits have been found in Leith at Beaverhall (Timpany and Franklin, 2006) and elsewhere in central Edinburgh (e.g. Timpany, 2006).

DISCUSSION

The two linear features (Contexts 14 and 16) are slight, and probably truncated, but convincingly interpreted as deliberately cut gullies on account of their regularity. They are likely to be medieval in date on the evidence of the finds, although it is notable that they follow a different alignment to the medieval burgh plots. The area exposed is too small to allow them to be interpreted with any confidence, but they do indicate that cut features of medieval or post-medieval date potentially survive in this location, despite the considerable truncation of deposits that is evident from the lack of a substantial buried soil horizon. The various marine shell, fish and mammal bone fragments from these deposits may derive from reworked midden deposits, as suggested in the discussion of the environmental samples; however, it should be noted that the features are cut into beach sand which contains layers of shelly material from which much or all the material may have derived.

The wall (Context 10) corresponds fairly closely to the position of a wall shown on the 1849-53 O.S. town plan, dividing the building on the end of the row opposite Lamb's House from the adjacent

property to the NW. The finds from the foundation cut of the wall indicate that it was built in the early 19th century. The building on the end of the row was demolished (by 1876-7) and the site left as an open yard. Context 10, if the identification is correct, would have become the gable wall facing onto this yard.

STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL

The results of the investigation indicate that any medieval or post-medieval remains within the area of the sunken courtyard are likely to be severely truncated, with only subsurface features surviving. In spite of this, the presence of two gullies, apparently of medieval date, cut into the sand subsoil, suggests that the archaeological potential of this area should not be entirely discounted, as features such as ditches, pits and wells could survive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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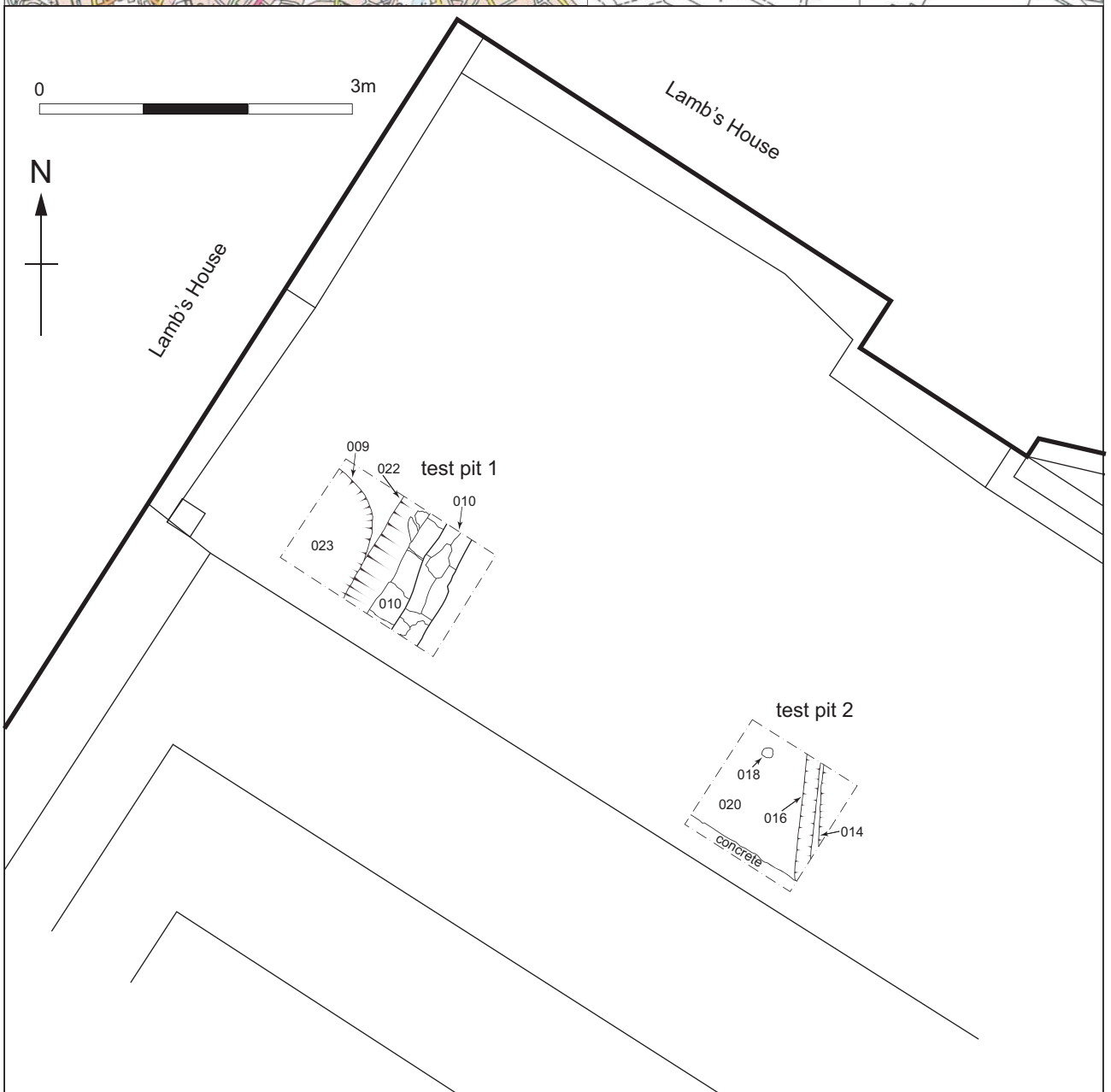
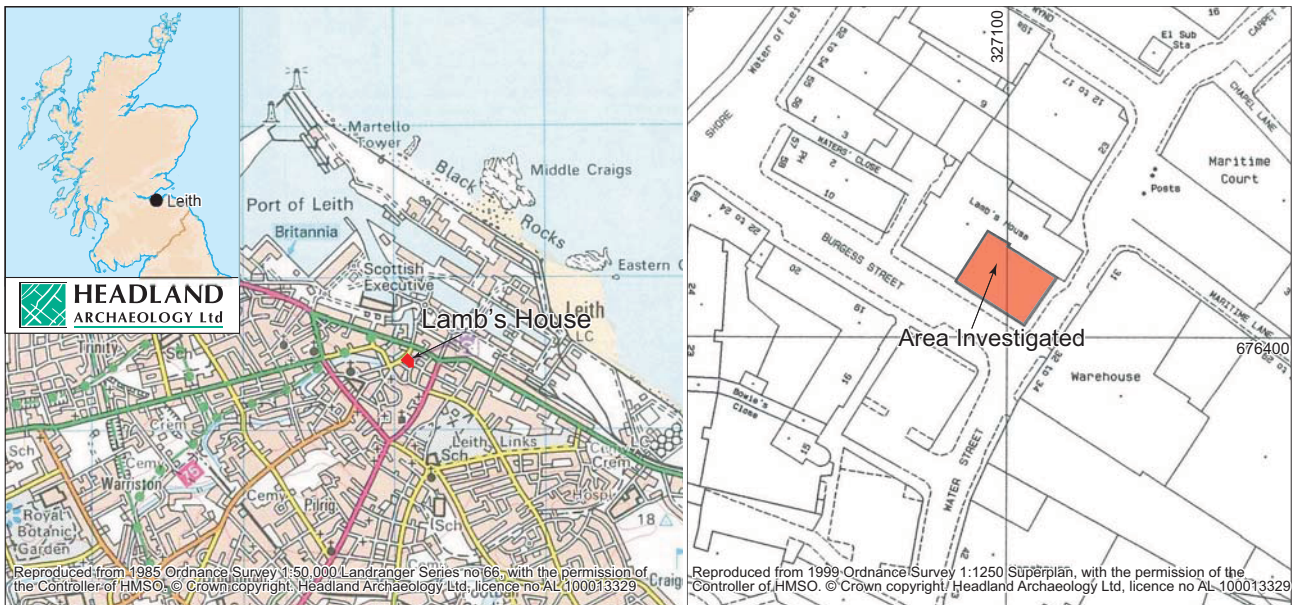
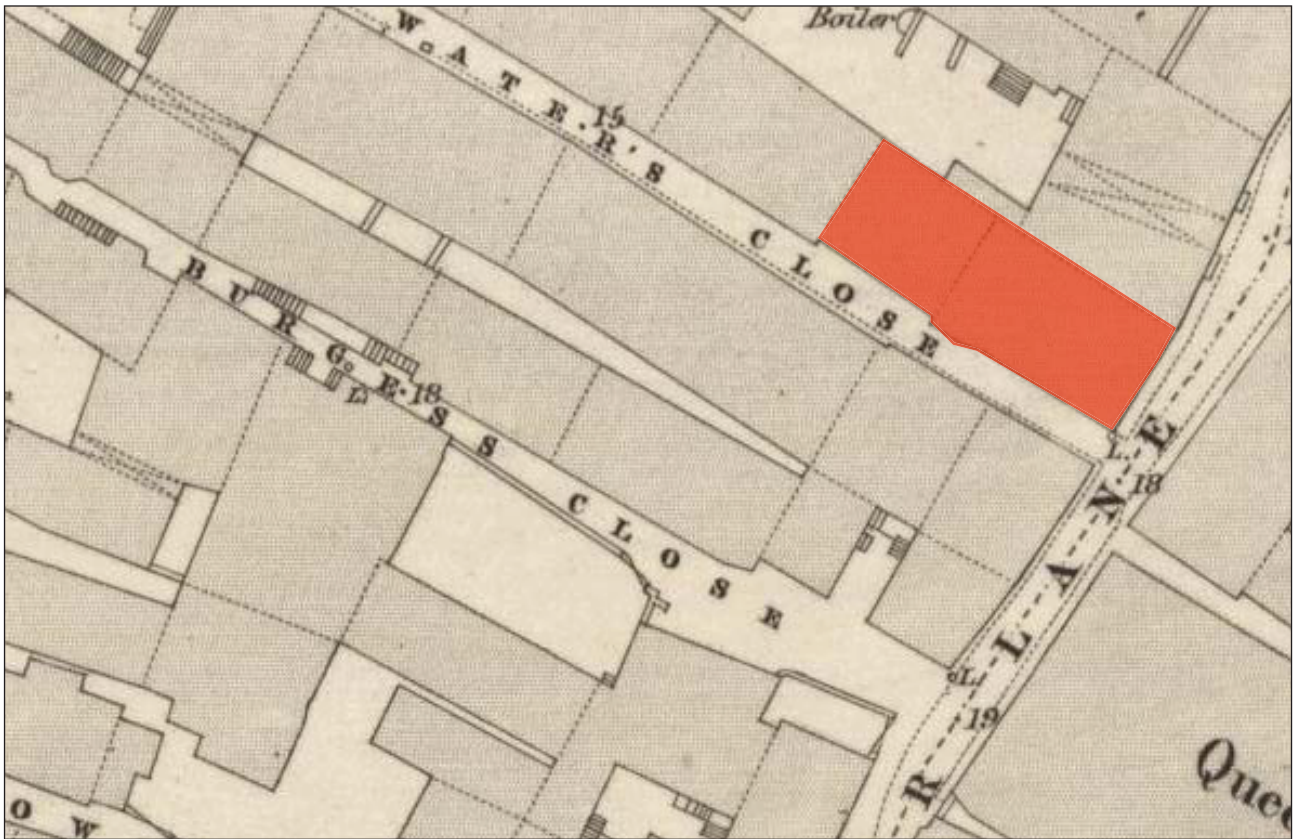


Figure 1: Lamb's House, Leith: Phase 1, archaeological investigation, test pits 1 and 2.



Ordnance Survey Town Plan of Edinburgh, 1849-53, showing location of Lamb's House.
Courtesy of the National Library of Scotland Map Library.



Ordnance Survey Town Plan of Edinburgh, 1876-7, showing location of Lamb's House.
Courtesy of the National Library of Scotland Map Library.

Figure 2: Lamb's House: 19th Century town plans.



Plate 1: Phase 1 test pits, facing NE with Lamb's House in the background.



Plate 2: Gullies 14 and 16 (partially excavated) in test pit 2.



Plate 3: Wall 10, facing SE.

Figure 3: Lamb's House Phase 1 test pits, selected photos.

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT REGISTER

Context	Area	Description
1	TP2	Fine grit, layer 50mm thick max, overlying Context 2: bedding layer for existing paving slabs
2	TP2	Stone chippings, layer up to 100mm thick beneath Context 1, overlying Context 3
3	TP2	Dark grey compact sandy silt, frequent cinder/charcoal fragments, oyster shell fragments, CBM and ceramic drain fragments; layer up to 30mm thick beneath Context 2, overlying Context 11
4	TP1	Fine grit, layer 50mm thick max, overlying Context 5: bedding layer for existing paving slabs. Same as Context 1.
5	TP1	Stone chippings, layer up to 100mm thick beneath Context 4, overlying Context 7. Same as Context 2.
6	TP1	Layer of mixed sand and rubble, covering most of test pit, overlain by Context 8 in SW corner, overlying Context 13.
7	TP1	Area of modern disturbance in W corner of test pit, overlying Context 8. Loose pale yellowish-brown stony sand, with a plastic bag retrieved from the base of the deposit.
8	TP1	Modern disturbance in W corner of test pit, beneath Context 7, overlying Context 6. Dark greyish-brown sand and gravel.
9	TP1	Large pit, at least 1.1 x 0.7 m wide, in W corner of test pit, continuing beyond limit of excavation to NW and SW; 0.65 m deep with steeply sloping sides. Cuts Context 21 (backfill of construction cut for wall) and contains Context 19.
10	TP1	Wall foundation aligned NE-SW, within foundation cut (Context 22) containing backfill deposit (Context 21). Wall is 0.6 m wide, built from roughly-squared stone blocks bonded with lime mortar, overlying a foundation course of massive stone blocks which projects 0.25 m from the NW face of the wall.
11	TP2	Layer of compacted rubble, up to 100mm thick, including fragments of frogged bricks, stone and mortar, beneath Context 3 and overlying Context 12.
12	TP2	Thin and discontinuous layer of pale brown silty sand, beneath Context 11 and merging into Contexts 15 and 17, overlying sand subsoil Context 20. Probably a truncated remnant of old ground surface.
13	TP1	Thin layer of cinder/charcoal beneath Context 6, overlying Context 19.
14	TP2	Cut of possible gully running across E corner of test pit on NNE-SSW alignment, WNW edge seen only. 50 mm deep max, regular and steep-sided. Cuts Context 20 and contains Context 15.
15	TP2	Fill of Context 14. Pale brown silty sand, indistinguishable from Context 12.
16	TP2	Cut of gully running across E corner of test pit on NNE-SSW alignment. 0.15 m wide, 50mm deep, steep-sided, cut into Context 20 and contains Context 17
17	TP2	Fill of Context 16. Pale brown silty sand, indistinguishable from Context 12.
18	TP2	Circular patch of dark brown sand, with a black area at the centre. 50mm deep with diffuse edges. Possible stakehole.
19	TP1	Pale greyish-brown sandy rubble deposit, beneath Context 13, filling pit (Context 9) and extending across the whole of the test pit.
20	TP2	Natural sand subsoil cut by Contexts 14 and 16. Contains well-sorted horizontal horizons of shell, shingle etc.
21	TP1	Dark brown sandy silt with frequent charcoal/cinder and frequent stone and brick fragments, filling foundation cut (Context 22) overlying wall foundation (Context 10) and cut by pit (Context 9).
22	TP1	Foundation cut for wall (Context 10), backfilled with Context 21. At least 1.1 m wide, 0.4 m deep, with vertical sides, cut into Context 23.
23	TP1	Natural sand subsoil cut by Contexts 9 and 22: identical to Context 20.

APPENDIX 2: DRAWING REGISTER

Drawing no.	Description
1	1:100 Location plan: test pits 1 and 2
2	1:20 plan of test pit 1, showing Context 6 in situ
3	1:20 plan of test pit 2, showing Contexts 14, 16 and 18
4	1:10 section of north side of test pit 2
5	1:20 plan of test pit 1, with pit Context 9 fully excavated
6	1:10 section of east side of test pit 2
7	1:20 plan of test pit 1, with foundation trench (Context 22) fully excavated to reveal foundations of wall (Context 10)
8	1:10 section of south side of test pit 1

APPENDIX 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

Photo No	Direction facing	Description
1	NE	Test pit 2 showing Context 3 exposed
2	NW	Test pit 1 showing Context 6 exposed
3	E	General view of site
4	WNW	General view of site
5	NE	Test pit 2 showing Context 11 exposed
6	SW	Test pit 1 following removal of Contexts 7 and 8
7	NE	Test pit 2 showing Context 12 revealed following removal of Context 11
8	SE	Test pit 1 showing Context 13
9	NE	Test pit 2 showing Contexts 14, 16 and 18 partially excavated
10	SE	Test pit 1 showing Context 19
11	NE	Possible stakehole Context 18 half-sectioned
12	SE	Gullies 14 and 16 fully excavated
13	W	Pit Context 9 fully excavated
14	NE	SW-facing section of test pit 2
15	NW	Pit Context 9 fully excavated
16	SE	NW-facing section of test pit 2
17	SW	NE-facing section of test pit 1
18	SE	Wall foundation cut Context 22 fully excavated
19	NE	Wall foundation cut Context 22 fully excavated

APPENDIX 4: FINDS CATALOGUE

TP	Ctxt	Smpl	Material	Qty	Description	Spot Date	Cn	Ill	Box
1	006		Glass	2	Bottle glass. Complete clear milk bottle, embossed 'THE PROPERTY OF MURCHIES EDINBURGH'/'MURCHIES ALFA MILK', Murchies Creameries, trading in 1960's, possibly earlier, to 1982. ½ pint size – individual portion? Also another clear bottle/jar sherd	20 th			
1	006		Plastic	1	Clear plastic fragment, part of larger object	L.20 th /21 st			
1	006		Glass	6	Window glass, good condition, one part melted	19 th /20 th			
1	006		Fe	4	Nails	Mod			
1	006		Cu	3	Cable, three lengths of the same, twisted 7-ply wire, approx lengths 36cm, 32cm, 20cm, electrical??	19 th /20 th			
1	006		Cu	1	Strip/ring, bent strip or large ring or band, diam c.26 (not jewellery)	19 th /20 th			
1	007		Glass	1	Bottle sherd, green wine bottle	18 th /20 th			
1	007		Fe	2	Nails	Mod			
1	013		Pottery	1	Modern whiteware, plain	19 th /20 th			
1	013		Metal	1	?Tin foil, milk bottle top, embossed lettering illegible, possibly belonging to above bottle	20 th			
1	013		Fe	12	Nails	Mod			
1	019		Fe	3	Nails	Mod			
1	019		Fe	1	T-bracket	Mod?			
1	019		Cu	1	Wire pin, head end encased in iron corrosion	16 th /19 th			
1	019		CBM	2	Brick, half of two diff bricks, handmade, red fabric, grey core, mortar covered	18 th /e.19 th			
1	019		CBM	1	Brick, complete handmade brick, red fabric, some mortar	18 th /e.19 th			
1	021		Pottery	3	2 Modern whiteware, 1 creamware sherd, 1 spongeware, blue decorated ?bowl rim 1 Caneware, Rockingham teapot lid	c.19 th			
1	021		Glass	3	Bottle sherds, 2 green wine bottles 1 clear bottle base, rectangular, possible waster?	18 th /19 th			
1	021		CBM	1	Brick, half a brick, handmade, red fabric, grey core, mortar covered	18 th /e.19 th			

TP	Ctxt	Smpl	Material	Qty	Description	Spot Date	Cn	Ill	Box
2	003		Pottery	1	Modern whiteware, fragment, cream?	18 th /19 th			
2	003		CBM	4	Drain pipe, stoneware, salt glazed exterior, olive & yellow lead glazed interior	18 th /20 th			
2	003		CBM	9	Floor tile, plain unglazed fine redware, moulded lettering on underside 'MADE IN ?LY TRI?'	19 th /20 th			
2	003		Concrete	1	Small fragment, iron stained. From around pipe?	19 th /20 th			
2	003		CBM	5	Brick, small sherds, red, black core, frogged	L.19 th /20 th			
2	011		Pottery	1	Modern whiteware, stoneware, white glazed	19 th /20 th			
2	011		Arch Frag	1	Rectangular block of ?granite, with liberal coating of pitch. Unusual building stone for Edinburgh – for paving or decorative effect?				
2	011		CBM	2	Brick, large pieces, about half/third of two diff bricks, same fabric as 003. Frogged, stamped 'WHI-', (possibly Whitehall Brickworks, Edinburgh, 1893-1947), some mortar	L.19 th /20 th			
2	015	1	Mortar	1	Small fragment				
2	015	1	Pottery	1	WG, fragment, yellowish green glaze, possibly same as 017	12 th /15 th			
2	017	2	Pottery	1	WG, small sherd, cream fabric, yellowish green glaze with brown streak	13 th /14 th			

Abbreviations & Notes:

Materials: CBM = ceramic building material (brick, tile & daub); Fe = iron, Cu = copper alloy; Pottery: Qty: number of sherds; Spot Dates: 14th/16th = a date between 14th and 16th centuries, 14th-16th = material covers whole range of dates; Cn = conservation; Ill = recommended for illustration; Box = location, box number or F = fridge, T = tank, S = stone store